

## “Travel Post-Pandemic”

### *Interview with Patrizia Cinquini Cerruti, the Italian Cultural Society’s “Ambassador to Italy”*



*Photo (Tutta Toscana Tour Patrizia in center with driver Luigi). It’s been several years since we last interviewed Patrizia Cinquini Cerruti, the [Italian Cultural Society’s See Italy Director](#). Patrizia has organized tours to her native Italy since 1987. “Altre Voci” caught up with Patrizia to ask what it is like to travel to Italy Post Pandemic.*

**AV: Tell us how Covid affected travel to Italy.**

**Patrizia:** *During the pandemic the restrictions made travel to Italy impossible, but as soon as they opened, even with tight restrictions in place, I traveled to Italy to see the situation for myself. It was confusing, even for someone like me who has made the trip well over 100 times. The airline personnel didn’t know the regulations and they seemed to change at each gate and port. Patience was certainly necessary, but it was worth it! I have made six trips since Italy reopened. I was one of the first “tourist” to arrive and I got a hero’s welcome. Of course, there was sadness in seeing so many places closed, some permanently, but also joy to be back and hope for the future.*

**AV: When did you bring your first Post Pandemic group?**

**Patrizia:** *The first group I accompanied was in March and April of 2022. We traveled to Campania and Sicilia. These were travelers who were scheduled to go with me in March of 2020. We traveled under restrictions, but they kept being modified even during our tour. The group was amazing, and we really enjoyed traveling together. I must thank these travelers for their faith in me and for being such wonderful travel companions.*

**AV: What kind of restrictions do you mean?**

**Patrizia:** *I am talking about mask mandates, having to wear a mask on all transportation including on our private motor coach and having to show proof of vaccination to enter public places including restaurants. I would brief my group and needed to make sure I was getting accurate up to the minute information. These mandates and the so called “green pass” requirements are no longer in place.*

**AV: Is it easy again to travel in Italy?**

**Patrizia:** *That’s a trick question. The answer is “yes” if you mean can travelers move freely throughout the Italian peninsula. But in another sense, travel is more difficult. Covid took out some of the small, local family run businesses. I am having to use all my experience, knowledge, and connections to plan tours which allow travelers to experience Italy like I know it should be enjoyed. There is a huge post pandemic demand for travel now, and there are real reasons, like energy costs and supply chain issues for price increases.*

**AV: Have you changed the tours?**

**Patrizia:** *Every tour I offer is always a bit different than the last. I learn from each tour, discover new places and meet new people. If something is special, I always want to share it! I used to do big tours. In the early years some of my tours were often very big, today I limit my tour size to about twenty. I like to know the travelers by name, learn about them and really share the trip with them. Often these fellow travelers become friends.*

*I think I have slowed the tours a bit. I never did rush drive by tours, but I am giving travelers time to experience and enjoy cities and regions. We stay a little longer and take our time to visit places. I sometimes meet travelers in my city of Lucca who are on a cruise ship shore excursion. They literally are given a single hour in my city! That’s absolutely WRONG!!! These folks are going to be shuffled between Lucca, Pisa and Florence in a single day, and make it back to the ship for dinner!*

*I taught Italian for Travelers classes for over 30 years and have written a few [travel books](#). I used to tell my students that going to Italy is like going to the best buffet in the world, but if you eat too much you will get indigestion. It’s tempting to overload your “travel plate,” but doing so*

*guarantees you won't be able to truly savor and appreciate anything. When I plan tours, I feel people trust my knowledge of the treasures a region has to offer, and know that I have selected the best, most representative, and broad experience possible to share with them. For some travelers this will be the only time they visit Italy and I want to give them an authentic experience.*

*At this stage of my life, I do these tours because I love it, and because I have spent most of my life learning and understanding Italy's incredible patrimony, its history, culture, art, food, and breathtaking places. I want to share my passion and love for my beautiful native country.*

**AV: Can you tell us about the people who travel with you?**

***Patrizia:** Wow, well there really isn't a single type of person. Over the thirty plus years I have enjoyed the company of all sorts of travelers. We have mature people in their 50s, 60s and 70s, but plenty of young people join our tours as well. I have even had a few very fit 90-year-old travelers. On one tour, my youngest traveler, a guy in his early 20s, and my oldest traveler, a 90-year-old were the only two of the group to climb the leaning tower of Pisa and Giotto's Bell Tower in Firenze. It's always a nice mix. Sometimes we have entire families, some singles, and couples. Generally, the kind of travelers who want to travel with a cultural organization are by definition "special". They are interested in culture, history, art, architecture, language, food, music. Some have Italian roots, but most just love Italy or have always wanted to see Italy.*

**AV: So even after over 100 trips you don't get bored?**

***Patrizia:** Oh, heck no! Italy is so incredibly rich in experiences, natural and manmade places that I don't think a single lifetime is enough to explore them all. I live in Italy, in my hometown of Lucca, for part of each year, but still have so many places to explore. Italy's treasures are so numerous and varied that I still have many new experiences awaiting. I participate in a few hiking clubs, a Fiat, Alfa Romeo and Ferrari car club and other cultural groups which take many trips in the area, and I am discovering new places, festivals, restaurants, farms, gardens, and museums all the time.*

**AV: Any words of advice for traveling post COVID?**

***Patrizia:** I presented classes called "Planning Your Italian Vacation" for years, as well as taught full semester classes for travelers, and my advice is pretty much the same. COVID was a game changer in many ways, but Italy is just as beautiful and has as much to offer as before. Planning your own tour takes time, research, and lots of dedication and planning. If one is going to go independently, I encourage people to start right away by keeping a travel journal before you depart. Write the places you most want to visit and why. Then research the places and talk to people who have been there if possible. I give places stars. The must-see places get three stars and the sort of interested get only one or no stars. Then lay the cities out on a map and see if they*

*make sense to see all in one trip. If most of your cities are in one or two regions, then limit the tour to those regions. Of course, you must consider the number of days or weeks you have.*

*Be careful of a lot of nonsense on the web. In the early days of travel, we used to call certain restaurants, hotels, and shops “tourist traps”. They still exist, but unfortunately today the “tourist traps” are also on the web! Many gimmicks have people sign up for “fake perks” like “skip the line” or expensive tastings and special visits that are a waste of time. I am not saying people must spend hours in line. But you don’t need a gimmick, almost every venue offers an entrance appointment. When I visit the Uffizi, the Accademia, the Vatican Museums, I always purchase a guaranteed entrance time. If you do travel without a tour don’t skip getting city guides. A good city guide can be worth their weight in gold! Tour managers, like me, will fight to get a certain guide because we know what a difference it makes to visit a city with the best, passionate, fun guide who brings a site to life versus a tiresome, dull guide who recites tedious dates and details one could get on Wikipedia!*

*The absolute best travel tip I, or anyone, can give, is to expect the unexpected - if possible, embrace it and enjoy it. Even the most thoroughly planned trip will have some glitches- train, bus or other strike, a reservation that gets “lost,” a bad meal, although in Italy this is rare, a rude person, or any other variety of “bumps in the road.” Don't let these derail your journey. Don't sweat the small stuff! Italy has something special to offer every day- rain or shine. Although Italy is profoundly rich in art, many of her greatest treasures are not in churches or in museums. Let yourself delight in the show Italy will make for all your senses. Live Italy and let yourself fall madly in love!*